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An Epic of the South West . .

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By RICH. GAALD *pseud.*

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By G. A. ALDRICH

NIL DESPERANDUM

I.

Methought I had the Muse encaged
In tinted realms of soul;
Where many-colored wars are waged
To find purposeless goal.
I seemed secure in poesie;
In roseate land of mind:
Perfumed of scented bath rosey;
The enervating kind.

II.

Methought I knew the sainted path
Of ruddy-fingered dream;
Of imagery, also, that hath
The potency of stream.
I felt I mastered rhyme divine;
Heaven; infinitude;
And every rhythmic verbal sign,
Poetic desuetude.

III.

Hold! See, I have these virtues still!
This-fancy crowning art,
Like sun-burst in the bosom, will
Inspire to the part.
Haste, haste, the pen, pigment and brush,
Parchment inspirited.
With silence of poetic hush
To speak when merited!

FOREWORD

The public is pitifully unaware of a certain interesting discovery made many years ago by our most eminent scientists resultant upon their chemistry researches; and meagerly published to the world. Distilled or very pure water, such as snow or rain, possesses stronger affinity for extraneous matter than the lesser pure product.

A certain prominent American professor of chemistry has proven conclusively that distilled water will absorb lead from conducting pipes.

Obviously it is not lacking in pertinency to presume upon inevitable contamination of impounded waters in the scoured regions of the high Sierras.

Waters of the lower regions are brought into contact with salt-bearing soils. These aid very materially in preserving them.

There can be no objections, we think, to the flowing waters of the higher regions.

THE AUTHOR.

AN EPIC OF THE SOUTH WEST.

We sing soft strains of fairy lands;
Of occidental Earth.
We sing sweet songs, ethereal bands
Of Muses once gave birth
In far-away wild Cathay realm,
This side Pacific wave;
Where no Odysseus held the helm,
No Aeneas wandered brave.
Where naught but hoary mountain height,
Green-capped in forestry,
Disputed daylight with deep night;
Grim Nature's chivalry.
Where boundless wilderness of sands,
Dust-ravaged, wind oppressed,
Stretched forth their gaunt be-fingered hands,
In sunburn gravely dressed,
Where cacti and coyote breathed
Defiance to the God;
When, in sharp thorns or fur-skin sheathed,
They kissed the rattle-pod.
Where monster saurian out-bleached
Its rivalling reptile-horde:
Horrific caudal-fixtured stretched
Prone forth upon the sod.
Where Myriad noxious atomae,
Too, vitiated all
Pertinent with our true botany.
Aye, Earth before the Fall!
Where thirsty thirst, presuming, durst
Inveigle life away;

Entrancing the righteous and cursed,
Return them clay to clay.
Where sweaty heat its thousand feet
Creeping, o'er-crawl and pierce
Animal flesh, with singeing heat,
Like fiery furnace fierce,
Where hillock and deep depression;
Arroyo, and ravine;
Dishevelling plane-possession,
Lend romance to the scene.
Where neither man nor deity
Care ever to sojourn:
To change from things much more pretty;
Forswear them but to yearn.
Where clouds, and winds, and starry skies
Are scarce of Paradise:
Rotting flesh's akin to flies;
And gangrened men are lice.
Here, here we steer, with tremblous fear,
Our craft of fancy-flight:
Here, here we linger: what place queer
More truly horrid, quite?

On pinnacle of porphyry,
Sprung sheer from out the sand,
Silhouetted against the sky,
Two human figures stand.
Two human figures clad in health;
Bronze-tinted with the sun.
Limber-muscle; with tread of stealth,
Like reptile man doth shun,
Tall, straight they, both; of proper weight:
Grim featured; hard as stone:
One aged quite twenty years and eight;
The other thirty-one.
Like in stature; and like in strength;

Like in their mental poise:
Like in their depth of soul, life-length,
Sonorousness of voice.
Americans two, these are; true
To ideal savagery.
Taught to do as wild Indians, too,
Devoid of imagery.
But rough and rugged, romantic
Soul, just beneath the burn,
Unbent through custom pedantic,
Can scarce escape this turn.
Americans two, these are; true
To ideal savagery.
Taught to think as wild Indians, too,
Devoid of imagery.
They stand and gaze, one quite amazed;
The other silent, glum:
They stand and gaze, with face upraised,
In stillness of the tomb.
They seem to peer into the queer
Depths of an airy haze:
One trembling slightly, as with fear;
The other firm of gaze.
They seem to peer into the queer
Unfathomable mist,
Enshrouding all the desert near;
Heat all a-quiver, twist.
Yea, at the edge of some mirage,
Intangible fay-glen,
They think they see another age;
Another race of men.
And myriad marvels consonant
With grotesque-fevered mind;
And fancy-tangled brain hard-bent
Such figured things to find.
For here, depicted in the air,

Are forms in featured art;
Setting forth a romance most fair;
An historical chart.
Strange stories told of things of old:
Of path-finding grandees.
Conquistadores after gold;
Or (emptiness) for praise.
And trips of ships with shredded strips
Of storm-torn stained sails:
Of caballeros on whose lips
Played Castille's langorous tales;
Yea, trips of ships with shredded strips
Of wind-torn o'er-worked sails:
Gowned friars fresh from their choirs;
Or disciplining flails.
Bold feats of arms; freaks of charms;
Of manliness and men.
Of glancing eyes: of maidens' sighs;
Marvels of sword and pen.
For here depicted in the air,
Are forms in featured art:
Setting forth a romance most fair;
An historical chart.

What time they gaze, steadfast, amazed
Upon the wondrous scene;
Warm, and o'er-pressed, with tense heat
glazed,
Miraged-miracled screen.
What time they stood, in soberest mood,
Contemplative, and still!
Now, then, imagine, if one could,
The heart-felt human will,
That filled the then of these two men,
Discovered of the now:
That filled these bronzed persons, when

They saw beneath a brow
Of umber-colored tumulus,
Wandering hitherward.
What certainly seemed a monstrous
Serpent, horrid, untoward.
Seemed to them hyperborean,
A giant metaphor,
Obscuring all else, puny, mean;
Devouring all before.
And miles, and miles, sinuous miles,
This object manifest
Upon the sun-burnt desert tiles,
Did permanently rest.
Sparkling bright in the brilliant light,
A gurgling liquid stream,
Dazzling e'en the accustomed sight,
Startling all peace of dream,
A ravishing river, ever a-shimmer,
Pellucid water welcome,
Lost in perspective, dimmer and dimmer,
From distance seemed to come.
Wonder, wonder! God of Thunder!
It was the work of Man.
Else super-natural blunder;
Some freak of fairy-glen.

“Great Tutochanullah, father,
Worthy American:
Tissaak, noblest Indian mother,
Tell us of why and when
This freak, this streak of liquid leak,
This artifice of man
Is create? Oh, Great Father speak:
Enlighten if you can.

“Tell us if thy mighty spirit
Hath sanctioned all this art;
This work, this craft? Dost know of it?
Does it please thy great heart?

“Tell us why, our Mother Nature
Distort, must yield to plan,
Where every lovable feature
Rent, must be now by man?”

Thus spake he, the elder bronzed son
With hair just turning gray;
And bent he toward the other one
Gazing far, far away.
Then a reply, with long-drawn sigh,
The younger native vouched;
And pointing toward the Northern sky,
Lustrous, divinely touched,
Spake this: “Oh hear, my brother brave,
White man’s work is for naught.
Know yonder mountains’ rocky cave,
Where this strange water’s caught
Is where lie the great Gods entrapped.
Yosemite close by.
Walled in by country rough, frost-capped;
O’er-topped with meager sky.
Is where lie the great Gods entrapped;
Thinkst thou they’re not aware
Of how these men have map out-mapped
All Earth, except the air.
And even it, the atmosphere,
Must yield to White Man’s way,
Exploited by airships most queer,
That dip, and “stoy” and “stay.”

“Aye, brave the Gods; and mighty too”;
Responded he of age:
“But shrewd is man; ah, shrewd most true;
Yet hogs they, on rampage,
Runting, rooting, hunting, shooting;
The world must fall before;
Wise they, as owls, always hooting,
Braggards they, ever-more.
Beat they will, these shrewd swine in swill;
Attainment is the end.
Push until they have gained their will:
E’en too, the Gods must bend.”

“Not so, not so, the scheme below
Must ignominiously
Go where all certain failures go:
Willy, nilly nilly.
Know ye brother yon widening bow;
Nestling amid the hills.
It is a lakelet which the snow
A-melt, plenteously fills.
See, the waters clear as crystal
Stagnate in the wide pool.
Browned, deep-hued, here make they tryst, till
Consumed by human fool.
*Tell me can new snow-water pure;
(Or rain-storm deftly caught;)*
*Impounded, many days endure
Fresh as when first ’twas sought?*
Know ye famed Mirror Lake, so-called?
(White Man thus nameth it)
Purest of water once; but galled;
Fever so shameth it.
Determine, then, the victory,
Shrewd Man yearns now to cry,
Shouting his valedictory

To artificial sky.
 Vain, vain the brain of civic-stain,
 Against wisest thunder.
 Behold it is uniquely plain,
 This aqueduct's blunder?
 Then look, ye, East and West and South
 To purify the sight.
 Gaze not upon this work forsooth;
 This artifice of night.
 It ill-becomes the giant tomes
 Of printed science neat,
 To teach diseases for the homes
 Where civilized men meet."

* * * * *

A gust of wind, and swirl of sand;
 Obscuring clouds of dust;
 Obliterating all where stand
 Those wise men, bronzed to rust;
 A whirl, a puff, and then out-snuff
 Our figures quaint of dream:
 The Gods had spoken quite enough;
 The rest shall speak the stream.

* * * * *

But, 'midst the mists, there still exists
 A wholesome sentiment.
 The world shall love, preserve in lists
 With all toward honor bent
 Logical use, and not abuse
 Of what our God has given.
 Not wanton waste, by every ruse,
 Of that for which we've striven.
 In lines catchy, write Hetch Hetchy
 With all we would cherish.
 Contemned for e'er let the wretch be,
 Desirous they perish.

The argument above would seem to suggest alteration in the Los Angeles aqueduct design. Why not discard the reservoir and other catchments?

THE AUTHOR.

Refrain, refrain thou fertile brain
Ambitious to impound
Tuolumne, swirling toward the plain
With troubled angry sound.
Desist, desist. Cease now thy jest,
Obviously thy fun:
Let Uncle Sam enjoy the rest;
And deem thy work well done.
Take the swirling waters plenty;
Pipe each pellucid drop.
But don't impound all that sent He:
A crystal sky-born crop.
Oh wondrous feat! Thou waters sweet
Logical, though odd.
O'er-bubbling, thou in rhythmic feet
Areas wide of sod.
Gathering of salts; shedding of faults:
Conserving all its worth.
Good as when from High Heaven's vaults;
More consonant with Earth.
Branding on itself Spring Valley:
Proud to go in cool flow:
Gathering, with gushing rally,
Just what it, too, ought to.
This the water, Nature's daughter
Purity, must envy.
Truly never Nature sought a
Conservation like Thee.

RICH. GAALD.
1911.



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